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MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN MATTERS RELATING TO NUCLEAR SAFETY AND RADIOLOGICAL PROTECTION

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS GC(XXXIV)/RES/529 AND GC(XXXIII)/RES/508

Efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency

The attached report by the Board of Governors and the Director General is being submitted to the General Conference pursuant to a request made by the Conference last year in resolution GC(XXXIV)/RES/529.

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EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON EARLY NOTIFICATION OF A NUCLEAR ACCIDENT AND THE CONVENTION ON ASSISTANCE IN THE CASE OF A NUCLEAR ACCIDENT OR RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

1. Last year, in operative paragraph 9 of resolution GC(XXXIV)/RES/529, the General Conference took note of a report by the Director General, in document GC(XXXIV)/INF/281, on the status and implementation of the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Early Notification Convention) and the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (Assistance Convention) and requested the Director General to "pursue further his efforts to promote the effective implementation of the two Conventions". This paper expands on some of the matters covered in document GC(XXXIV)/INF/281 and gives an account of developments since that document was issued.

2. As mentioned in paragraph 2 of document GC(XXXIV)/INF/281, the Agency's Emergency Response System (ERS) was formally put into operation on 18 January 1989. In the event of a nuclear accident or radiological emergency, the ERS is capable of receiving and passing on notifications at any time of the day: during normal Secretariat office hours, the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) at the Vienna International Centre (VIC) can immediately activate the ERS; outside those hours senior technical staff members of the Secretariat are continuously on call in case VIC security officers (trained to recognize messages concerning actual or potential emergencies) have to contact them, whereupon they will decide on the need for activation of the ERS and initiate activation if that is deemed necessary.

3. There have still been no notifications of accidents of the kind specified in Article 1 of the Early Notification Convention, but information received from Member States about situations which they have felt should be

brought to the Agency's attention in the spirit of the Convention has, from time to time, been passed on by the Agency to other Member States and other international organizations given the actual or potential interest in the situations in question. There has been a positive response to such information dissemination, which has – in addition – proved useful as a means of periodically testing the Agency's communication systems, so that the Secretariat intends to continue with the practice.

4. As reported in document GC(XXXIV)/INF/281, the Agency has provided help under the Assistance Convention following two radiological accidents: the radiological accident in Goiânia, Brazil, in 1987, in which the misuse of an abandoned medical teletherapy source led to radiation injuries (resulting in four deaths) and to widespread contamination; and the radiological accident in 1989 at an industrial irradiation facility in San Salvador, El Salvador, which resulted in one death. Since the latter accident, no other requests have been received for Agency assistance under this Convention.

5. The ERS is at present undergoing modification – particularly as regards emergency response procedures and the ERU's facilities – in the light of the lessons learned from the comprehensive ERS exercise conducted on 19 April 1990 (see para. 5 of GC(XXXIV)/INF/281). It is expected that a second comprehensive ERS exercise will be conducted early next year.

6. Also in the light of the lessons learned from the ERS exercise conducted in April 1990, and of the general experience gained in operating the ERS, the "Emergency Notification and Assistance Technical Operations Manual" (ENATOM) and the "Manual on the Use of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Global Telecommunication System (GTS) for the Early Notification Convention" (see para. 2 of GC(XXXIV)/INF/281) are being revised; the revised manuals will be distributed to Member States and to other international organizations as soon as they are available.

7. With the help of an advisory group, the Secretariat is preparing a further document for use in implementation of the ERS. The document deals in particular with information and data exchange during the early hours and days following a nuclear accident or the start of a radiological emergency. It will be ready for publication this year (see sub-para. 10(a) below).

8. Co-ordination with the World Meteorological Organization and the World Health Organization (see para. 6 of GC(XXXIV)/INF/281) and with other organizations belonging to the United Nations family is being pursued through the Inter-Agency Committee for the Response to Nuclear Accidents (IAC/RNA)[1/], which is working on the formulation of an agreement specifying the responsibilities of each United Nations organization that might become significantly involved in a radiological emergency.

9. The Secretariat will continue its efforts to increase the effectiveness of the ERS through further upgrading of the Agency's response plan and implementation procedures, the training of staff, co-ordination with Member States and other organizations, and periodic ERS exercises. However, the focus of its attention will begin to shift towards ensuring that each Member State has the ability (i.e. infrastructure etc.) to receive a notification and to transmit one to the Agency in a timely manner and also the ability to receive critical radiological information from the Agency or nearby States and to inform its citizens quickly and in an appropriate manner and protect their health and safety.

10. With this objective in view,

(a) a document entitled "Guidance on the International Exchange of Information and Data following a Major Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency" will be issued this year;

1/ IAC/RNA was established in 1986, following the Chernobyl accident, at the initiative of the Agency and with the co-operation of a number of other United Nations organizations.

(b) the Secretariat will this year provide all Member States with computer software by means of which encoded information and data in Agency formats transmitted electronically to Member States during an emergency can be automatically decoded into plain language;

(c) assistance to developing Member States in improving their emergency response infrastructures and systems for communicating with the Agency will be provided through – inter alia – regional emergency planning and preparedness training courses, and expert missions; and

(d) the Secretariat will develop guidance on how to exploit advances in communications and computer software and thereby improve the interface between the Agency and Member States during a nuclear accident or radiological emergency.

11. Since document GC(XXXIV)/INF/281 was issued (in August 1990), FAO and the following States have become Parties to the two Conventions: Brazil, Cuba, Greece, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Turkey. Finland, Italy and Yugoslavia, which were already Parties to the Notification Convention, have become Parties to the Assistance Convention. As of 31 July 1991, 58 States/Organizations were Parties to the Notification Convention and 55 States/Organizations were Parties to the Assistance Convention.[2/]

2/ See document INFCIRC/335/Add.5 – INFCIRC/336/Add.6, to be issued soon.